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RUYNAAC/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA PRIORITY
RHHMHBA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI PRIORITY
RHOVVKG/COMSEVENTHFLT PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 007010

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TAGS: MARR PREL JA

SUBJECT: LAWLESS/ISHIHARA ON YOKOTA, FCLP, AND US
COMMITMENT TO DEFENDING JAPAN

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, Reasons 1.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary: During a Friday, December 1 meeting with Under Secretary of Defense For Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Richard Lawless, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara: referenced the recent Abe-Bush discussion on civil-military dual-use of Yokota Air Base; explained his rationale for requesting dual-use; and offered that Tokyo's outer island, Miyakeshima, be considered as a candidate for Field Carrier Landing Practice. Lawless: underscored the continued strategic military value of Yokota Air Base; confirmed U.S. commitment to the Yokota civil-military Dual-Use Feasibility Study in government-to-government channels; reminded Ishihara that once the study is complete, there will be additional government-to-government discussions before a final decision is made on whether to pursue dual-use of Yokota Air Base; and explained that the U.S. has already committed to address many Japanese requests for adjustments in its posture. End Summary.

Pressing for Dual Use of Yokota

12. (C) Ishihara expressed his appreciation of the recent Abe-Bush Yokota discussions at APEC, which he characterized as Abe's confirmation that he shares Koizumi's position (which he did not characterize) on civil-military dual-use of Yokota. Ishihara also expressed appreciation for the effort to facilitate civilian aircraft through Yokota's airspace and the planned reductions of airspace. He offered four arguments to support civil-military dual-use of Yokota Air Base: 1) Yokota can offer the surrounding population of 10 million an alternative to ground transportation in an area otherwise too mountainous for airport construction; 2) increasing competition with the rising Chinese economy necessitates expansion of commercial airline slots in the Tokyo area; 3) U.S. corporate jet arrivals deserve a faster processing time than the already congested Japanese airports can deliver; and, 4) Yokota has not been used much since its service repatriating dead U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War.

13. (C) Lawless responded that the U.S. is committed to the bilateral study on civil-military dual-use of Yokota Air

Base, as first raised in the May 2003 Bush-Koizumi discussions at Crawford and as described in Cabinet-level alliance transformation agreements. Lawless put the study in the broader context, explaining that the regional security situation has evolved and Yokota Air Base, as an important Alliance capability, is more critical than ever. He added that the decision to bring Japan's Air Self-Defense Forces onto Yokota confirms that both the U.S. and Japanese governments appreciate the value of Yokota to the Alliance. Lawless said that nothing is pre-ordained, reminding Ishihara that the study is one stage in a multi-stage process: once the study is complete, the two governments will then discuss the results and then decide how to proceed.

Offering Up Miyakeshima

¶14. (C) Ishihara mentioned a recent discussion with Hiroshima Governor Fujita in which he learned that the local communities surrounding Iwakuni, which will receive the Atsugi-based Airwing, are completely against Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) in their region, citing possible desecration of a national shrine at Fukushima. As an alternative, Ishihara then offered Miyakeshima as a candidate FCLP site. While residents had previously rejected the idea, the intervening volcano and population flight have reduced their economic prospects so drastically that the only way the island could be viable is by accepting night landing practice. Ishihara stated his desire to have the Japanese central government consult with him about this proposal.

¶15. (C) Lawless replied that FCLP permanent relocation is a major issue within the alliance transformation framework that

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both governments are committed to resolve, hopefully by the end of 2007.

Not Just Yokota

¶16. (C) Lawless emphasized that Yokota needed to be seen in the context of the political and military commitments of alliance transformation, which reflect both governments, decisions about the capabilities needed for the alliance. He pointed to planned deployment to Yokosuka of the U.S.S. George Washington, a "national strategic asset," as visible proof of our strong faith in the alliance. In that context, the move of the carrier air wing from Atsugi to Iwakuni was a burden that the U.S. accepted in response to a Government of Japan request in order to ensure the continued forward deployment of the carrier in Japan. He told Ishihara that "everywhere we can adjust without sacrificing critical capabilities, we've adjusted." Lawless added that the GOJ aggressively represented local communities throughout the numerous and often heated discussions and, as a result, the U.S. has committed to a lot.

Ishihara's China Specter

¶17. (C) Ishihara admitted to suspicions that the U.S.-Japan alliance might not withstand all China-related war scenarios. He predicted problems in the Chinese economy after the Beijing Olympics, which could lead to military adventurism. Since this would coincide with a new U.S. administration with little appreciation of regional dynamics, he expressed concern about the consequences for Japan.

¶18. (C) In response, Lawless reminded him that the U.S. has made sacrifices when it needs to, as it did for Korea, and that it stands ready to fulfill its commitments for Japan.

SCHIEFFER